

Dancing time. Dissociative camp and European synchrony

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The results of the 2007 Eurovision Song Contest ignited the by-now familiar arguments about the “takeover” of the competition by the Eastern “newcomers”. With the exception of Greece—whose status as part of Continental Europe may already be ambivalent in that, even though it has been a member of the European Union since 1981, it retains strong cultural and geographical ties to the Balkan—no Western European country qualified to the top ten in either the semi final or the final. This gave rise to the predictable accusations of “political voting”: that since the former Yugoslavian and the former Soviet Union countries give the highest points to each other, it is nearly impossible for a Western European entry to be successful in the contest.

Two counterarguments immediately present themselves. First, especially considering the Serbian and Ukrainian entries in 2007, one can credibly suggest that the Eastern European songs were simply “better” and therefore their success well deserved. Anyone familiar with the Eurovision tradition should nevertheless be hesitant to resort to this logic, for “quality” is a notoriously unstable criterion with which to approach the campy entertainment of the song contest. The most memorable Eurovision performances are often, precisely, celebrations of the obviously overblown,

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the inanely tasteless and the tediously mediocre.

The second available response to those who accuse the voters of Eastern European countries of being in cahoots is to recall that political voting has *always* been a part of the Eurovision Song Contest: Scandinavian countries consistently support other; because of its large immigrant population, Germany traditionally gives the highest scores to Turkey; France is particularly disposed to liking Portuguese entries; homosexuals vote for Israel; and so forth.¹ What this response may miss is the fact that the controversy

¹ We cannot resist affirming here the counterintuitiveness of the 1998 Finnish finalist Marika Krook’s biblical pronouncement concerning the Homosexual Mafia after Dana International’s victory: “[A]nd the homosexuals voted for Israel.” We owe this reference to Mari Pajala’s essay in this issue.

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over the 2007 results arguably points to a genuine shift in the constitution of Europe and its communal identity. We suddenly find that traditional loyalties of Old Europe are outweighed by the new political landscape emerging in the East. In other words, we should take the controversy over the “Balkan Mafia” seriously, treating it as a symptom of an *Unbehagen* of contemporary European identity. It is significant that the “bloc voting” argument has found particularly fertile soil in a country like Germany, which is living in the aftermath of its 1990s reunification process.²

This unease belies the explicit goal of the European Song

2 While the Eastern extension of Europe provides new markets for Western global industries, it also threatens Western European societies with its offer of cheap labour. This is one of the reasons for Western Europe’s ambivalent attitude towards the East. (The restriction of Eastern European workers in Germany by law, as opposed to the Western Europeans who automatically have work permits in Germany, testifies to this fear.) In the aftermath of the reunification, Germany didn’t turn into the “blossoming landscape” that Chancellor Kohl had promised but experienced its highest unemployment and strongest economic crisis since the Second World War. For an overview of this development, see Ritter 2006. But the fear of the “East” is not just of an economic nature. Before the wall came down in 1989, a significant part of historical European memory existed unheard behind the iron curtain. Although the sites of the concentration camps were spread all over Germany, the “Vernichtungslager” (“extermination camps”) as opposed to the “Arbeitslager” (“work camps”) were mostly located in the less heavily populated East of the Reich, hiding them from the German population. Auschwitz and other sites of horror belonged to what after 1945 became Polish territory. For an account of the planning of the “final solution”, see Browning 1998. With the fall of the Wall, this era of European history literally came closer.

Contest. Having been established as a form of celebration of European unity after more than forty years of separation, the ESC re-emphasised this goal in the early 1990s as the European Union began its eastward expansion (Wolther 2006, 27).³ Two years before the “Maastricht Treaty” (Treaty of European Union, TEU)—the most important reformation of the EU since the 1950s, which also prepared the inclusion of former Eastern European countries in the years that followed—came into being, the Italian singer Toto Cutugno invited Europe and Europeans to “come together” with “Insieme: 1992”, his winning song in the Zagreb contest of 1990 (Feddersen 2002, 254).⁴ With his demand of “Unite, unite, Europe!” Cutugno is not the only voice in the song contest to pronounce and proscribe such a movement for unification. Four years after Cutugno’s anthem of European togetherness, the masters of ceremony in Dublin commented on the entry of such Eastern European countries as Romania, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary and Russia to the competition. In their welcoming words, the MCs announced the eradication of the former binarised identities of the Eastern and Western Europe. “The European map is changing rapidly”, they noted. “Old countries are disappearing and new ones are born. And when the east is no longer the east and the west is no longer the west, Europe has become greater” (quoted in Pajala 2006, 149). The integrationist fantasy of

3 Wolther describes television—including the first song contest in 1956—as a medium for the political project of cultural exchange and cooperation to stabilise peace in Western Europe in the 1950s.

4 Jan Feddersen explains Cutugno’s success in the context of pop songs that thematised the European reunification in the early 1990s.

a “greater Europe”, seeking a synchronised continent that moves with one beat while retaining the distinctiveness of national cultures, arguably embodies the cultural project of the Eurovision Song Contest itself.

While the participation of Eastern European countries thus offers the prospect of a Europe that is not only bigger but also “one”, the accusations of “bloc voting” rupture this hope of European unity. It seems that if we take the results of the 2007 contest as indicative, Europe is inevitably moving to several different beats. If equevelocity is the ideal, the synchronising of European temporalities appears a failing project, for, in the very least geographically speaking, the continent irreducibly consists of different time zones. The Finns, with their liminal position between the temporalities of the East and the West, have long been attuned to the difference that time makes in one’s attempts to become European. Attempting to, as Lacan would have it, symbolise what sometimes seems the insidious trauma of repetitive losses in the Eurovision Song Contest, Finns have explained their lack of success, until Lordi, by their culture’s asynchronism vis-à-vis Continental Europe. As Mari Pajala (2006) points out in her study of the reception of the song contest, Finnish commentators have often latched onto to the singularity of their time zone—an hour ahead that of Continental Europe—as a convenient trope for the untranslatability of Finnish entries for European consumption. Even if European mainland time is equally out of joint for the English, the Irish, the Portuguese, the Greek, the Israeli and the Turkish, the tradition of *nul points* for the Finnish entries has consequently been

glossed as the result of the entries being out of step with the pace of European pop music. As a magazine article commented on yet another Finnish loss in 1992: “We’ve always been either a couple of years ahead of time or ten years too late” (quoted in Pajala 2006, 94).

If some countries within the Eurovision community have thus been familiar with the asynchronism of cultural differences, the debate around the 2007 results implies that such temporal dilemmas have entered the larger European consciousness. What we have here may be an uneasy acknowledgement of the fragility of the attempts to give coherence and meaning to the shifting space of Europe by modeling it according to the structure of an “imagined community”. According to Benedict Anderson (1991/1996, 24), the impersonal spaces of national communities are bound into consistency by the temporality of the “meanwhile”. This shared time—first emerging with print culture and subsequently extended by other media—turns anonymity and absence into an “imagined” togetherness, a fantasy of the national body moving as one. The temporality of the “meanwhile” allows perennial strangers to inhabit the same nation-space by projecting an anonymous synchronism to their lives. This synchronism has enabled “a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning”, a redemptive, progressive project to which the ideology of nationhood, according to Anderson, is ideally suited (ibid., 11). Adopting the phrase from Walter Benjamin, Anderson attributes to the nation “the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time”: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through

homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation. – Within that time, ‘the world’ ambles sturdily ahead.” (Ibid., 24, 26, 33.)

The Eurovision Song Contest is obviously one of the media that allow the cohering of anonymous crowds into coherent national bodies. Over and above the individual nations, however, the community whose unity is “imagined” in the ESC is that of the transnational body of Europe. Yet, if Europe sees its unity in the terms of the paradigm of imagined communities, the hope of its integration may have been that the newcomers, whose arrival the 1990 and 1992 contests announced, would have entered the European space-time as adaptive *évolués*, seeking to share its temporalities, to pledge allegiance to its futurities. Depending on the social-Darwinist hierarchisation of evolution into a teleological, universal template of progress, *évolué*, as a part of the idiom of French colonialism, designates a “native” whose “progress” has been beneficially accelerated and channeled by his or her willingness to embrace the missionary benevolence of the colonisers and their culture. As such, the dream of synchronism, where the “new” countries scramble to catch up with European ideals of modernity and democracy, has familiar resonances for post-colonial thinkers who have argued that colonialism understands the world according to the normative teleology of “evolutionism”, according to which “social formations at any single point in time can be ordered chronologically from ancient to modern in a way that corresponds to a parallel moral ordering from inferior to superior” (Rosaldo 1990/1995, xiii).

What troubles the realisation of such dreams of synchronism is the untenable notion of developmental time on which it relies. Some of the discordances may be signaled by the fact that some of the new time zones of the East are, of course, *ahead* of the time of Continental Europe. In this essay, we propose to situate the temporising project of Europeanisation in the context of *camp temporalities*. Camp has arguably been the dominant modality through which the Eurovision tradition has been read. How can one rethink the imagined time of the “meanwhile” through camp temporalities? What forms of critique and contestation of this shared temporality have been staged in the Eurovision Song Contest? We suggest that the debate around the 2007 contest can be productively cast in terms of several such temporalities, of which we identify here two: those performed under what we call *commodity camp* and *dissociative camp*. While the former term approximates Barbara Klinger’s (1994, 137–42) notion of “mass camp”, the latter designation we adopt from Michel Foucault’s gloss on Nietzsche’s taxonomy of historiography in “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben”. As always, Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s interests remain in thinking futurities that affirm a radical difference from life’s extant forms. This temporality of emergence and newness informs also our discussion of dissociative camp. We propose to tweak queer theories of camp with a focus on the peculiar forms of temporality that propel camp sensibilities. In particular, Verka Serduchka’s performance in the 2007 contest suggests to us some of the ways in which the homogeneous time of the “meanwhile” can be pluralised. As opposed to the progressivist history of

coordination, unification and expansion that some of the Union's hopeful representatives would have us remember, Verka Serduchka's performance arguably draws attention to the twentieth-century catastrophes of synchronism and sameness. Yet, it also proposes alternate choreographies that can absorb disparate tempos without letting go of the pleasure of synchronised movement.

Commodity camp. Scooch and DQ

In her recent work, Judith Halberstam (2006) seeks to dismantle the hegemony of camp as *the* hermeneutic tool in academic readings of queer archives. According to her, the perspective of camp has impoverished the affective range of the possible relation to one's archives. Rather than the registers of "fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, [and] insincerity" that for her characterise campness, Halberstam points to the palpability of "rage, rudeness, anger, spite, impatience, intensity, mania, sincerity, earnestness, overinvestment, incivility, and brutal honesty" through whose lens the queer subject may negotiate and reinvent the world (ibid., 824). Halberstam's project of expanding the scale of queer affects parallels Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's challenge to the "paranoid imperative," whose hegemony in academic queer projects has disabled any attempt to carry out "reparative readings" (Sedgwick 1997).

As such, Halberstam's opening is a welcome effort to enrich and diversify what Sedgwick calls the "gene pool" of queer negotiations (Sedgwick 1997, 21). But seeing camp

as devoid of feeling or intensity (other than those named by "ennui," "boredom" and so forth) may itself mistake the affective range available through campiness. Like the clichéd public fantasies whose circulation Teresa de Lauretis (1999) has tracked, in order to work, camp performances have to elicit the kind of devotion that is characteristic of the performances in the subcultural archives Halberstam works with. De Lauretis cites Antonio Gramsci's argument that, in their repetitiveness and familiarity, public fantasies have to be "something deeply felt and experienced" (quoted in de Lauretis 1999, 316). This applies to camp clichés, too: in its guilty secrets and flaming pleasures, camping often offers intense affects. Following Paul de Man's discussion of irony, one can suggest that campy irony is not about self-control and sophistication (as is usually assumed) but, on the contrary, about *the pleasures of losing control*: "Irony comes into being," de Man avers, "precisely when self-consciousness loses its control over itself. -- [I]rony is not a figure of self-consciousness. It's a break, an interruption, a disruption. It is a moment of loss of control, and not just for the author but for the reader as well" (quoted in Johnson 1989, xii). The intensity of this loss of control, we suggest, results from the fact that camp, as we understand it, functions as a mode of *archival production*, that is, an actualisation of something new from the past and its archives. According to Andrew Ross (1988, 5), camp emerges "when the products -- of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to produce and dominate cultural meanings, become available in the present for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste." Camp produces newness by tapping onto an archive to

which its performances nevertheless do not remain, *in a certain sense*, faithful. Klinger (1994, 140–141) argues:

Sheer historical difference does not produce camp; camp results from an imposition of present standards over past forms, turning them into the outdated. – – [C]amp resurrects past artifacts, not to reconstruct their original meaning in some archaeological sense, but to thoroughly reconstitute them through a theatrical sensibility that modifies them by focusing on their artifice.

At stake, nevertheless, is the *precise mode* of such camp “resurrect[ions]”; a question that Klinger does not adequately address. Camp, we propose, does not amount to forgery; but neither is it the result of the faithful diligence of an antiquarian history, to evoke Nietzsche. Even in its “artifice”, camp is made of *loving repetitions* that avoid misquotation, for camp performances are driven by libidinal attachments to the archives of one’s embarrassment and shame. Even if the camp attitude affects postures of cool, amused repetition of such archives, it seeks not the redemption from, but the prolongation of, such intense affects as shame. The postures of control of and distance from one’s past mortifications inform, rather, the identity politics of “pride”. If, as Klinger writes, camp finds its object in the past, it becomes a way of extending yesterday’s shame into a resource for non-normative, possibly non-dialectical identifications in the present. Camp opens the archives of the queer childhood and adolescence as the riches of embarrassments: the queer kid’s inappropriate objects of fascination and love are fondly remembered

not in spite but (partially) because of the harassment and shaming they invited on the hapless child. As theories of gay shame propose, such disciplinary repercussions indicate that one had unwittingly veered beyond the matrices of propriety and heteronormativity. Theorists of gay shame seek to re-mobilise such errancy as a resource for one’s present contestation of normativity.⁵

But while outright misquotation is disallowed, neither is it enough for the camp practitioner to be a diligent archivist. The staging of camp, in the sense in which we evoke the term, fails if it is produced according to what Nietzsche calls the sensibility of “antiquarian history”. The antiquarian is one who “preserves and venerates” (Nietzsche 1995, 102) history in its minutia and detail, one whose gaze is firmly fixed on the past while neglecting the possibilities of life in the present. Antiquarianism is conservative rather than creative: it “understands how to *preserve* life, not how to create it; therefore, it always underestimates those things that are in the process of becoming because it has no divining instinct – – . Thus, antiquarian history impedes the powerful resolve for the new” (ibid., 106). Dwelling in the details of the past, the antiquarian fails to see that “knowledge of the past is at all times desirable only insofar as it serves the future and the present – not insofar as it weakens the present or uproots the future that is full of life” (ibid., 108).

5 See Probyn 2005; Crimp 2002; Warner 1999; Sedgwick 1995. For critique, see Ahmed 2005; Halberstam 2005; Perez 2005.

The antiquarian mode of history may be exacting and labourious in its call for precision and accuracy, but in its respectful diligence it adds up to what we call commodity camp. Like antiquarian history, this form of camp production assumes that, as an affectionate rehearsal of past attachments and representations, all that camp requires is meticulous research and competent reiteration. Its practitioners, again like the antiquarian, presume the static nature of the archive. In the 2007 song contest, the exemplars of this form of camp were the Danish entry, DQ, and the UK finalist, Scooch—the most recognizably “gay” performers of the event.

Beyond teasing us with the open secret that being a flight attendant is a “gay profession,” Scooch offers no invitation to further reading, does not trigger a desire for further delving into its representations. It remains commodity camp, quickly digestible like the “naughty-naughtiness” of the song’s queer double entendres (“Would you like something to suck on for landing, sir?”). We accept the standard argument according to which camp performances eschew all notions of interiority and depth—that with camp, all we can proceed with is surface. Yet, while camp’s play takes place entirely on the surface, its movement always suggests something like *an infinite extensibility of this plane*. Similarly, camp as archival production works through the extensibility of its surfaces, its capability for being folded. Scooch fails in this play, for, in its performance, everything becomes visible at once. In order for camp to work, the superficiality at the same time suggests some surface secret, an invitation to reading.

Also Denmark’s DQ illustrates commodity camp’s mistake: the assumption of the relative easiness and accessibility of camp; that one cannot fail to reproduce its affects through “professionalism.” We do not wish to deny or underestimate the loving detail and dedicated knowledge that goes into the scrupulous evocation of drag aesthetics in performances such as “Drama Queen.” Yet, while such camp pieces require dedication to the history of femme-reality, they do not challenge the present forms of existence and representation. They are thoroughly commodified, performances that any hotel’s night club promoter would consider accessible and nonthreatening to the mostly straight, mostly coupled audience.

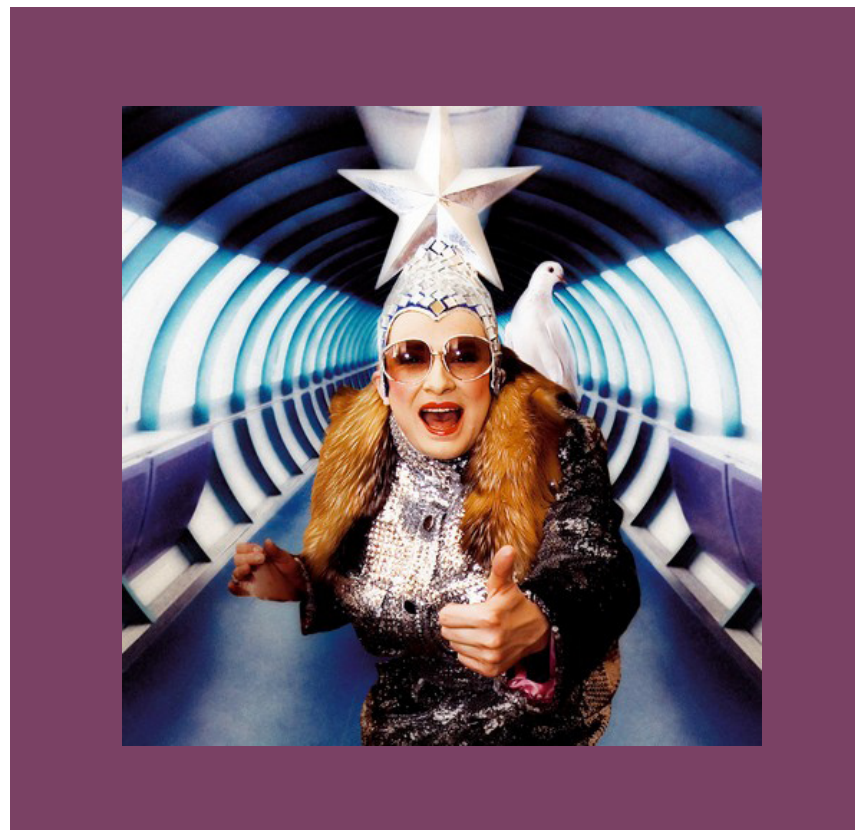
Commodity camp is thus structured according to a one-way traffic between the performer and the citation, the queen and the archive. As such, it functions much like realism in painting: arguably, neither directs the interrogative eye on the viewer. The antiquarian drag queen becomes, in Louis Marin’s words, “[an] illusion [that] – – does not reach out to me in order to capture or seduce me” (quoted in Bersani & Dutoit 1998, 45). Like realist paintings, productions of commodity camp are to be “contemplated and appraised dispassionately” (ibid.). The viewers and critics remain external to representation: “Not being in the painting, we can judge its adequacy to the reality or the idea it ‘imitates.’ – – If realism requires that we, as viewers, educate ourselves in order to earn our position of superiority, the work itself demands nothing of us except that we be its dispassionate judges. It doesn’t look out at us, it doesn’t call to us; it awaits our verdict.” (Ibid.) Even when it seem-

ingly flirts with limits and transgression, commodity camp, like the modes of realist representation Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit investigate, never undermines the narratives of one's self-knowledge.

All together now. Verka the superego

Having characterised the mode of commodity camp as a form of Nietzschean antiquarianism, we would like to adopt the elaboration of Nietzsche's taxonomy of historiography that Foucault (1971/1998) gives us in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History". In his manifesto for genealogical critique, Foucault morphs Nietzsche's modes of history into what can be considered their uncanny doubles: the practices of monumental, antiquarian and critical historiography are rearticulated as ironic/parodic history, dissociative history and history that amounts to "the sacrifice of the subject". While ironic and sacrificial historiographies are not irrelevant to our definition of camp production, we concentrate on the mode of "dissociative history"; Foucault's counterpart to Nietzsche's antiquarianism, to characterise camp and its temporalities.

Rather than bolstering an existing identity (of a community, a people, a nation) by establishing an unbroken continuity of the past that inexorable leads to who we are now, dissociative history unravels the narratives of our evolution. This unraveling is produced not by replacing extant archives with new resources but by highlighting what is already immanent in the old material. Dissocia-



tive history locates in the archive what Foucault calls its "subindividual marks"; which contribute to the received narrative of our history while simultaneously allowing this narrative to *become* by opening it into unexpected directions. This historiography activates what Foucault calls "statement-events", immanent in all archives (Foucault 1968/1998, 321). Training its eye on these events or sub-

particles, “history will discover not a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn, but a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis” (Foucault 1971/1998, 386).

Along these lines, the paradox of dissociative camp time is that it actualises newness from an archive without exceeding the parameters of the archive’s resources. The mode of this actualisation is not an un-veiling or discovery; rather, camp gives us a minute observations of that which is already familiar in the genre. If Foucault’s genealogy—and, consequently, dissociative history/camp—seeks this level of imperceptible statement-events, in Deleuzian terms it is, simply, the method of thought itself: “thought [or camp] may actively function to passively interrupt habit and expectation by allowing something already there in the series, in the subject or object, to become” (Grosz 2001, 70).

Let us take one prominent example of what we consider dissociative camp in the Helsinki contest. Like Denmark’s “Drama Queen”, the Ukrainian entry, “Danzing Lasha Tumbai”, was a three-minute drag show. Yet, unlike DQ’s commodity camp, Verka Serduchka’s performance, even though recognizable in its glittery silliness, does not target a carved-out niche in a field of potential consumers. Rather, the status of the performance seems unclear in several ways. Whereas DQ’s song title relies on the wide audience recognition of a phrase that, despite its queer genealogy, has been thoroughly integrated into mainstream culture usage—everyone and their teenage daughter can nowadays be a “drama queen” — “Danzing Lasha Tumbai”

immediately opens onto a field of dangerously contested interpretations. As the commentators to the Finnish television broadcast of the finals noted, the title phrase “lasha tumbai” has been condemned by (unnamed) Russian officials as an obviously underhanded, politically hostile shot at Ukraine’s neighboring country: “Russia goodbye.” (The matter was not resolved by the Ukrainian delegation’s assertion that the phrase meant “whipped cream” in Mongolian. Appropriately, the claim turned out to be a creative improvisation without any basis in reality.)

The uncertainty concerning the precise meaning of the song title—including the suspicion that the phrase may not be in the vocabulary of any extant language—is repeated in the group’s appearance in general. Unlike DQ’s performance, which conscientiously touches on all traditional reference points, gives a nod at every familiar cliché, Verka’s drag has what one might call, following Foucault, a “slantwise” relation to drag tradition’s staged feminine hypersexuality (Foucault 1981/1997, 138). For Foucault, this slantwise tracing of “lines of fragility in the present” (Foucault 1983/1998, 449) names precisely the dusting off of the diminutive, overlooked statement-events that exist, in plain sight, in our archives, and the subsequent weaving of new genealogies of becoming.

While Verka’s performance is clearly “gay” — the star topping her helmet acknowledging the status of the Eurovision Song Contest as “gay Christmas”⁶ — the signifier

⁶ The German journalist Elmar Kraushaar has declared the Eurovision Song Contest “a holiday almost as important as Gay Pride and more passionately awaited than Christmas” (quoted in Wolther 2006, 139).

is unmoored from all of its available denotations. The futuristic silver sheen of the costumes, accompanied by Verka's immaculately white stockings and sensible shoes—something any nurse could be proud of—disallow one's efforts to place the group firmly and unequivocally into any existing tradition. Any effort to read Verka as a comfortably unsexed character is belied by a further doubt about her status: as her futuristic costume and awkward dance movements suggest more a mechanical essence than a sentient individual, she becomes, in the precise sense in which Freud uses the term, uncannily undecidable. This uncanniness is also temporal: her figure merges tradition and futurism into a camped-up hybrid.⁷

As much as the title of the song mixes recognizable and unrecognizable elements—we are called to “dance!” but what mode is stipulated by the imperative of *lasha tum-bai*?—the song is performed in a mixture of at least three natural languages: Ukrainian, German and English. At times it is unclear when we leave one language and enter another, as with the repeated phrase *tanzen!* Even though given in the German imperative case, the term is clearly operative in all three languages. As Europeans, our possible unease with the uncanny undecidability of Verka's performance is not lessened by the fact that her jerky gestures are orchestrated by the insistent repetition of

⁷ Ukraine's cultural histories were highlighted with Verka's diminutive “mother,” a babushka accompanying the group to most press conferences and public appearances. Verka's links to Slavic cultural traditions were perspicaciously evoked by the independent Eurovision memorabilia store Limbo, which during the event sold t-shirts of Verka as a babushka doll.

the German *eins! zwei! drei!* Apart from suggesting the beginning of a possibly infinite numerical continuum—an endless, yet strictly regulated, expansion—the phrase is, above all, used at moments where synchronism and harmony requires the simultaneous movement of any number of individual actors. As with the English “one! two! three!” the German *eins! zwei! drei!* often opens group musical or dance performances, allowing simultaneity and coordination. Repeated throughout the song, Verka's phrase also calls for the audience to join the performers in “dancing lasha tumbai,” perhaps to discover together, through the coordination of improvised movements, what the song's title entails.

If there is an off-key, even menacing, undercurrent to Verka's ebullient delivery, it issues from the oddness of the fact that such commands are given in German. The German phrase stands out because it is spoken by a non-native speaker in a competition where English has become the common language of performances—some have suggested, a requirement for any kind of success—since the 1970s. While a number of other Eastern European entries have recently rejected English in favor of their respective native tongues—including the 2007 winner, Serbia's “Molitva” by Marija Serifovic—Verka appears to do something different. Without any kind of fluency in either German or English (a point that she announces at the beginning of the song and that was repeatedly emphasised by the Ukrainian delegation),⁸ Verka, with her oddly mechanical and

⁸ Verka's invitation “to speak the language of dance” was lived out in the live television broadcast of the finals, when the Finnish comedienne Krisse Salminen, forgetting Verka's alleged deficiency in English,

repetitive German, seems to stumble onto the stage from another era of European history. Her rudimentary and choppy diction recalls the time before the Second World War, when German was imposed as the lingua franca in Eastern Europe, or, even more uncomfortably, the years of the German militaristic expansion of 1914–1918 and 1939–1945 in Europe.

In this context, it is impossible to escape the militaristic tone of Verka's call to *tanzen!* Indeed, whereas in the English military idiom, the terms "left! right!" are used to give marching orders, in German such instructions are delivered as, precisely, *eins! zwei!* The playful call for the performers to begin their song, and the audience its dance, becomes indistinguishable from the demand for the synchronous, orderly movement of a collective body, such as one finds enacted in marching orders—or in the kinds of contemporary fantasies of European unity we noted above. Verka's two background dancers, too, carry out such temporal demands: in their routine, they repeatedly point to their wrists, as if to remind the audience both of the hour and of our necessity to *make haste, to catch up.*

If Verka's dance is really a synchronised march, it cannot but remind us of the very fantasies of synchronism that the European Union, and its representations through media spectacles like the Eurovision Song Contest, has posited as its ego-ideal. Verka's commands echo the celebrations

went over to the Ukrainian party to interview them. Remembering too late what she had been told, Salminen could but ask the group to join her in an improvised dance performance in front of the live television audience. See Peltomäki 2007.

of European togetherness that have been staged in past Eurovision spectacles. Her performance also highlights the uncannily scripted nature of such imperative to neighborly love and mutual enjoyment. If Verka herself looks like a Christmas tree, her costume, a mosaic of mirror tiles, is repeated in the massive disco ball that dominates the background stage. As artifacts, the mirror ball and the Christmas tree are designed to induce the instantaneous affects of pleasure, enjoyment and (particularly in the case of the Christmas tree) familial togetherness, bypassing any delay between stimulus and reaction. Suggesting the scripted nature of our affective responses, they reduce our behavior to the predictability and manipulability of automation.⁹

The Christmas tree and the mirror ball also suggest the *superegoic character* of contemporary calls for Europe to unite. If there is an unspoken crisis in the European Union, it stems from the fact that, as witnessed by the repetitive rejections by different voting populations, the European Constitution fails to command the citizens' belief and loyalty. The cultural and political rifts between the different nations—for example, France and Germany—are covered over by the official discourse of a shared history and a mutually beneficial future. This discourse of togetherness simultaneously sounds the unspoken warning that only this effort to come together will prevent a reenactment of past atrocities.

⁹ Our thinking here has been influenced by the art of Pirjetta Brander, which, in an exemplarily Bergsonian fashion, highlights the mechanical tendencies in human emotional lives with the artifacts of the Christmas tree and the mirror ball. See Tuhkanen 2005.

Verka's *eins! zwei! tanzen!* is a delirious repetition of this command for Europeans to get along and to "enjoy themselves." As such, Verka also reveals the superegoic resonance of such dictums. One can't command people to dance and "enjoy" — unless, of course, this command comes from the superego. As Slavoj Žižek (1991/1994) and Charles Shepherdson (1995) have suggested, the postmodern superego is not one that chastises and represses; rather, it calls us to *have a good time*: "when we enjoy, we never do it 'spontaneously,' we always follow a certain injunction. The psychoanalytic name for this obscene injunction, for this obscene call, 'Enjoy!', is superego" (Žižek 1991/1994, 9–10.) As Shepherdson (1995, 45) continues, "The question, 'What must I do?' has been replaced with the higher law of the question, 'Are we having fun yet?' The imperative is written on the Coke can: 'Enjoy!'" Europe, we suggest, is familiar with this form of "American Kantianism: 'think whatever you like, choose your religion freely, speak out in any way you wish, but you must have fun!'"

One may suggest, then, that Verka and the dancers reflect back to the Old Europe its patronising call for the emergent Eastern democracies to catch up with European modernity, to bind themselves into the West's "imagined community," to share the time of its "meanwhile." This reading would propose that, in the queer mirror that Verka is holding up for the Old Europe, the militaristic German recalls that such temporal demands for unity and synchrony may not be distinguishable from Nazi Germany's dream of a Europe without differences.¹⁰ Hers is the archive of

10 The simultaneously musical and militaristic *eins! zwei!* also recalls

European embarrassment: Europe's own less than glorious history.¹¹

The march and the waltz

However, were Verka Serduchka's performance reducible to a reminder of history's atrocities, it would not function as dissociative camp but, again to borrow from Nietzsche, *critical camp*. That is, it would remind us of the dangers of fantasising about synchrony and unity on the continental scale, the catastrophes that such dreams have actualised in the twentieth century; it would argue that our present life carries within it, and is consequently determined by, this past. As an exclusive and "*uncontrolled*" (Nietzsche 1995, 131) endeavour, critical history is stagnant and moribund; its practitioners are priests and judges who search for devastating evidence in our imperfect pasts. In this mode, Verka's performance would echo the cynically paranoid accusations with which Poland's administration frequently blackmails the European Union: that the EU is replicating Nazi politics, that its interests are secretly governed by

the forced labour of orchestras on the concentration camps, where Jewish musicians — the "lucky" few who often escaped more arduous labour or immediate execution — were forced to perform as evening entertainment for the officers and guards, while the mass murder of other prisoners went on.

11 For the newly-emergent nations of Eastern Europe, demands for cooperation and sameness may also uncomfortably evoke the marching orders given by the Soviet regime. From this perspective, our reading of the politics of the Eurovision Song Contest would benefit from a consideration of ESC's now-defunct Eastern counterparts, the Intervention Song Contest and the Sopot International Song Festival.

German arrogance, and so forth.¹² Here one can observe the thoroughly conservative character of critical history: like antiquarian history, it gives us the past in the form of “[a] cynical canon: things had to evolve in precisely the way they did, and the human being could not have become any different from human beings today, since it is futile to rebel against this ‘must’” (ibid., 146).

In reflecting the darkness of European history in its queer mirror, Verka’s performance nevertheless does not give us the cynical pronouncements of a judge or a priest; rather, it “utilize[s] the past as a powerful nourishment” (Nietzsche 1995, 163). Whereas Toto Cutugno had a clear message for his listeners—“Unite, unite, Europe!”—Verka’s instructions, despite the seeming precision of the *eins! zwei!*, are harder to follow. Given the context of European history, we are not sure if we should capitulate to the imperative of European synchrony that the phrase recalls.

However, the song’s *eins! zwei!* is equally often extended with *drei!* With the third movement, the marching orders morph into something completely different: the rhythm of the waltz. Thus, the campy pleasure of the song is such that we may risk the violence linked to *eins! zwei!* by reinventing its command. This reinvention is suggested by the background dancers, who, during the last ten sec-

12 This has been a discussion especially in 2007, for instance prior to the Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit to Poland in March. For a discussion of the aggressive attitude of the Polish media towards Germany, see the interviews with the German director Volker Schlöndorff in Puhl & Wolf 2007 and with the politician Erika Steinbach in *Frankfurter Allgemeine* 2007.

onds of “Danzig Lasha Tumbai”, break off the synchrony of their movements and begin to “improvise” according to their own time. In doing so, they call the audience to find a nonsynchronous way to move, or waltz, with the larger body of the crowd.

In its danger-courting joy, Verka’s performance complicates Halberstam’s description of camp’s cool noninvolvement. To explore more passionate possibilities for engaging one’s archives, Halberstam (2007) discusses queer performers and bands that have produced cover versions of other people’s songs. For these performers, irony is not a form of dismissal or disengagement. She cites Bernie Bankrupt, the lead singer of the Canadian dyke band Lesbians On Ecstasy, who explains: “The irony is thickly layered on top of our music, but in the end we’re doing our best to make the most sincere, awesome versions of these songs that we can.” As opposed to camp’s alleged snootiness and detachment, LOE’s lesbian-feminist irony is characterised by earnestness. “Maybe part of being feminists, women and lesbians”, Bankrupt continues, “is that we can’t really escape our sincerity. We kinda like the songs, too.” (Quoted in Halberstam 2007, 54.)

In this vein, we suggest that Verka produces for us a cover version, of sorts, of the idea of Europe. While her performance parodies the simplistic pretensions to geographical and temporal sameness and synchrony, “Danzing Lasha Tumbai” cannot be reduced to a damning critique, a scandal-mongering exposé or a sovereign dismissal. Like the cover versions Halberstam analyses, it seems to us

too attached to the original—which may never have been actualised in history—for it to accomplish such complete renunciations. The same clearly applies to our argument about dissociative camp in the Eurovision Song Contest. Our reading of “Danzing Lasha Tumbai” does not culminate with the repetitive marching orders of *eins! zwei!* because, like the song itself, we cannot escape our sincerity. We kinda like Europe, too.

With Verka Serduchka’s dissociative camp, “art” takes the place of (monumental, critical or antiquarian) history; as Nietzsche (1995, 132) writes, “art is the antithesis of history, and only when history allows itself to be transformed into a work of art, into a pure aesthetic structure, can it perhaps retain or even arouse instincts.” As a piece of art, “Danzing Lasha Tumbai” evokes in the listener the same ambivalence that Žižek has identified in Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy”; widely adopted as the anthem of the European Union. While the Ninth Symphony has most often been understood as a celebration of human togetherness, Žižek writes that it “actually tells much more than one would expect about Europe’s predicament today.” He draws our attention to the symphony’s odd shift after the blissful orchestral and vocal variations of the melody that open the piece: “at Bar 331,” he notes, “the tone changes totally, and, instead of the solemn hymnic progression, the same ‘joy’ theme is repeated in the ‘marcia turca’ (or Turkish march) style, a conceit borrowed from military music for wind and percussions instruments that 18th-century European armies adopted from the Turkish janissaries” (Žižek 2007). Whereas critics have been befuddled and

angered by this inexplicable shift—some “compar[ing] the sounds of the bassoons and bass drum that accompany the beginning of the *marcia turca* to flatulence”—Žižek suggests that what we hear from the Bar 331 onwards is not so much a contingent perversion of the Ode’s sublime celebration of humanity but a “return of the repressed” that have been banished by the symphony’s pretentious opening movements: “[W]e should thus shift the entire perspective and perceive the *marcia* as a return to normality that cuts short the display of preposterous portentousness of what precedes it—it is the moment the music brings us back to earth, as if saying: ‘You want to celebrate the brotherhood of men? Here they are, the real humanity...’” (ibid.; ellipsis in original.)

If “Ode to Joy” stages the impossible-ethical demand to “love thy neighbor”—whose difficult imperative Žižek sees played out in the debates around Turkey’s membership in the Union—Verka’s military camp similarly dissociates and critiques contemporary European narratives of the continent’s past. Yet, Verka’s “diagnosis of what today is” is marked by an orientation to unknown futures. In Foucault’s (1983/1998, 449–450) words, it “does not consist in a simple characterization of what we are but, instead—by following line of fragility in the present—in managing to grasp why and how that which is might no longer be that which is. In this sense, any description must always be made in accordance with these kind of virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, that is, of possible transformation.”

Analogously, Verka's superegoic imperative *tanzen!* may trace the ignoble underside of the European "ode to joy", in whose performance the peoples of the united continent are supposed to harmonise, but it also pries open spaces for different futurities by unraveling histories that, from the perspective of antiquarian or critical camp, appear intractable.

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